

status

N E W S L E T T E R

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GFA BASIC VERS. 3

By Willie Niepraschk

It took more than 4 weeks to receive this new version of GFA BASIC. Was it worth the wait and the \$43 it cost me? I have always been a fan of this Basic and this new version has lots of improvements and additions. There have been many reviews done about this new release in other magazines, therefore I would like to compare it with another popular Basic, Quick Basic IV, by Microsoft for IBM computers. The compiler version of GFA BASIC VERSION 3 was not yet available. It is expected to be available early in 1989.

GFA BASIC has about twice as many commands as QB4. Some of the commands in GFA BASIC are duplicated, in other words, they perform the same function. I suspect this was done to make it more compatible with other BASICs. For example, one can say `PRINT AT(10,15); LOCATE 10,15;` or `HTAB 10:VTAB 15.` QB4 only supports the `LOCATE` command. I find the `PRINT AT` commands to be the easiest to use. QB4 is also lacking commands that allow you to manipulate a mouse. I find this hard to understand since Microsoft sells a mouse for the IBM PC. You must buy a separate disk to get mouse support. GFA BASIC also includes commands that allow you to sort arrays and to delete or add an item within the array.

GFA BASIC also includes more variable types than QB4. You may choose from a Binary (True or False), a 8 bit integer (0 to 255), a 16 bit integer

(-32768 to 32767), a 32 bit integer (-2147483648 to 2147483647), or a 13 precision floating point number. In QB4 you may choose 16 bit and 32 bit integers, and single and double precision floating point numbers. Since using floating point is slower and less accurate than using integers, I do not use them often. Even when dealing with dollar and cents I much prefer to convert the number to cents, do all my arithmetic and then display it as `PRINT USING "###.##;N$/100.` I wrote a Payroll and Accounting program using integers. This limits the largest check one can write to 21 million dollars. I feel that anyone writing a check that big would most likely not trust a computer doing it. Having 8 bit integer and binary variables does not necessarily increase the speed, but it does save lots of memory. This could be important if one creates large arrays since an 16 bit array will take twice the memory of an 8 bit array.

QB4 does not support WINDOWS (a GEM like interface written by Microsoft for the IBM PC computer). This means no pull down menus, no dialog boxes and all the other nice goodies that can improve the user interface of your program. GFA BASIC VERSION 3 makes it very easy to use the GEM features. Pull Down menus are created with ease. Using the scroll bars and other boxes of a GEM screen are much easier to use than in earlier versions of GFA BASIC. Within minutes I was able to create a window with sliders, resize button, title menu and other GEM goodies. Trying to duplicate this with QB4 would take days of programming.

The editor on this new version of GFA BASIC was also improved. It now shows the current line number and time in the top right corner of the screen. The new HIDE procedure command is very useful. Just go to the procedure you wish to hide and press the HELP key and all the lines within this procedure will disappear from the screen. The procedure name will still be listed in your program. Just press the HELP key at the procedure name and the hidden lines will appear. This works very well and I like it much better than it was implemented on QB4. I really like the way GFA BASIC automatically indents each statement. This makes it very easy to find where to put those ENDIF statements.

With QB4, string arrays are limited to about 100K. GFA BASIC does not have that limitation; strings arrays are limited only by the amount of memory in your computer.

Converting QB4 or MSBASIC programs to GFA BASIC is very easy. Converting GFA BASIC to any other BASIC may be very difficult since there are numerous commands in GFA BASIC that are not supported by any other BASIC. To convert to QB4 you must change all your variables names that contain the underline character to periods, PROCEDURES must be changed to labels, all IF statements must have a THEN, etc. Most of the changes can be done with any text editor (Make sure your files were saved in text format) using the replace option.

Both programs have numerous bugs.

While running GFA BASIC programs, my computer has locked up and I had to press the reset button to recover. I prefer GFA BASIC over QB4 and I am hoping that it will be available for the IBM in the near future. GEM is already available for the IBM, so it really should not be that hard. GFA has already ported their drafting program over to the IBM world. An Amiga version of GFA BASIC should also be available soon. GFA really could make a lot of money on the IBM since that is the number one computer here in the US. It would also help us Atari folks by having a much larger user base.

And yet another 'new' Basic for the ST is about to make it's debut (HISOFT BASIC). It promises to be QB4 compatible. This would make it easier to translate BASIC programs between the IBM and the ST. I still feel that it would be very hard for any new BASIC to beat GFA BASIC in power, ease of use and speed.

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SO YOU WANT TO BE A SYSOP?

or How to start your own BBS
(Inexpensively!)

Bob Womack, SysOp, STATUS RBBS

If you've been gnawing over the possibility of starting a BBS, hopefully this article can help. In order to make the second line of the above title true, we're going to assume you want to start an 8-bit BBS. Why?

You'll be tying up a computer, a monitor, at least one drive, and a modem. While there's at least one public domain BBS program available for the ST, the ST itself is a formidable investment for a beginner.

A usual first question when one is starting a BBS is, "what do I need?". The two biggest items you need are time and determination! Time, because setting-up and maintaining a BBS takes a fair chunk of this commodity, and determination, because many new SysOps seem to run out of the will to go on just as their BBS is beginning to pick-up steam. No matter how good a job you do, it takes time to get rolling with a group of users.

There are several programs which make it easy to start a BBS. The single most important factor in deciding which program you can use is your modem. Most of the really well-designed BBS programs are implemented for a 1200 baud modem with interface, because these days most people who do alot of telecomputing want at least 1200 baud. So far, I'm sorry to say I haven't found ANY that support the Atari SX212 in direct-connect mode. A friend has modified a stock program, AMIS (see below), to run 1200 baud with a directly-connected SX212, by using a public-domain SX handler.

If you plan to run your BBS at 1200 baud, it's probably best to soak the dough into either an 850 interface or a P:R: Connection if you can. Look for a used, inexpensive 850 Interface,

from someone who is moving up to an MID or an ST computer. My own 850 cost me \$25. If you can't find one, get the P:R: connection from ICD. ICD also offers SpartaDOS, which is probably the best DOS for the 8-bit.

When I first took up guitar I found the single biggest factor which caused novices to STOP playing guitar was a cheap guitar! They are uncomfortable (even painful) to play and often don't sound good even when played well. That could also apply to bulletin board systems: Even a well-operated program of a limited design can often frustrate a new SysOp because of the extra time and effort it requires to operate while not offering anything extra to entice users to log on.

There is also a trade-off in the BBS software game: If you BUY a BBS program, you probably won't need to know too much programming to make it work well. If you get your program FREE, very often you must know a fair amount of BASIC programming to get it to do what you want. It's all in what you can afford and what you want to accomplish. Many SysOps I know started on AMIS, modified the heck out of it (a very satisfying and learning experience), but eventually moved into BBS Express. 'Nuff said.

On to the software. In my humble opinion, the best series of BBS programs for the 8-bit Atari are the BBS Express programs from Keith Ledbetter of Orion Micro Systems. These are written in ACTION! language

so they are extremely fast. They allow up to 25 message bases, E-mail, and a complex and flexible library text-file menu system. They require a minimum of maintenance and have lots of features to save you time and effort and allow you to concentrate on the features you are offering. They also allow you to pre-allocate your disk space to the very last sector so that you have the maximum number of features possible without worrying about a file growing till it fills a disk, causing the system to crash. Most public domain BBS programs don't protect you that well. Express is practically bomb-proof, meaning it just about can't be crashed- even by those odd creatures out there who attempt to do just that. It's available for the 850 Interface, the Atari XM301, or a modified Atari 1030 modem. It is now available in a new, expanded, machine-language version called Express PRO! for systems with hard drives. It costs about \$40 and can be ordered directly from Orion Micro Systems (see address below). Since the new version has come out, there are lots of 850 BBS Express master disks floating around looking for new homes. The only limitation on a used disk is that you won't be able to get the reduced rate if you update to PRO (one update is allowed per serial number). BBS Express really comes alive when used with SpartaDOS, which in turn costs about \$35 new and can be purchased from an Atari computer store or directly from ICD (see address and BBS phone number below). SpartaDOS has just come out in a 64k cartridge which all the "cutting edge of technology" folks will soon be rushing

out to buy, so the disk version (3.2) will probably be available USED for a song and dance soon!

Now, on to the free BBS software! Probably the friendliest BBS for the 8-bit is AMIS. It's been released in 300 and 1200 baud (with 850 interface) versions and is available on, and supported by, Compuserve's SIG Atari. A version is available for the XM301 or modified modified 1030 modem (a description of the modification necessary is included). AMIS has only one message base, but it is written in BASIC so you can monkey around with its design and add features as you like. It is quick, clean-looking, and has single-key commands. You can decide which drives you want data to come from and go to by altering the program. It comes with an excellent DOC for beginners. AMIS doesn't have passwords, so you have no security system and anyone can log on with anyone else's name. It can be modified to run an SX212 connected directly to the SIO chain like a disk drive (someone in STATUS user's group has done just that).

Next is "Forem". Forem is a very nice multiple message base BBS with lot's of features including an extensive download system, private electronic mail, password protection, and security levels. It is also available on Compuserve free. Unfortunately, because it is an extremely large BASIC program, it is a little slow. But, because it is written in BASIC, you can make alterations as you wish. It is

available in versions for the XM301, the 1030, and 1200 baud modems with an interface.

Running a BBS can be as easy and cheap as downloading a 300 baud BBS program from Compuserve and configuring it to your system, or as elaborate as investing about \$100-\$150 and coming out with an easier to operate and easily expandable system. AMIS for the XM301 is available for downloading on STATUS BBS in a single DISCOM compacted file.

Addresses, etc.

ICD, INC.

1220 Rock Street

Rockford, Illinois 61101-1437

Orion Micro Systems

2211 Planters Row Dr.

Midlothian, Virginia 23113

ICD Express BBS

(815)968-2229 (300/1200/2400

Online product help and ordering!

Midnight Express BBS

(804)379-4156 (300/1200/2400)

Online BBS Express help

STATUS RBBS

TEL: (804)-495-3905

Oh yes, one suggestion: Have your BBS access as many of your text files (like help menus, etc.) as possible from a RAMdisk if you have one, so they show-up to the user almost instantaneously. Feel free to log on STATUS RBBS (the "R" is an anachronism meaning "remote") and leave me feedback telling me how you've done!

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SOLDERING BASICS

By Don Soward

"I've been doing it this way for twenty years!!!!" A phrase that always galls me to hear. My reply was "How does it feel to be doing it WRONG for twenty years?"

A few weeks ago, one of the guys at work suggested I take a short course in soldering. "Soldering" I said. "Why...I've been doing it this way for twenty". So, I took the short course, and welllllll..... I've been doing it wrong for twenty years.

The emphasis was on the use of the proper tools and cleanliness. TOOLS? I have a pocket knife, a soldering gun (the big one), and rosin core solder...what else do I need?

Was I surprised to learn that I needed a few extras.

- 1) DISPENSER(Flux)
- 2) FLUX, soldering (Resin)
- 3) DISPENSER, Solvent
- 4) BRUSH, Acid
- 5) ALCOHOL, 99.5% Isopropyl
- 6) APPLICATOR. Cotton Tipped
- 7) WIPER, Large
- 8) WIPER, Small
- 9) alignment TOOL (Orange Wood Stick)
- 10) ERASER, Ink
- 11) WICK, Solder Removal #1 (Small)
- 12) WICK, Solder Removal #2 (Medium)
- 13) WICK, Solder Removal #3

(Large)

14) TOOL, Solder extractor Edsyn
DSO-17

15) TOOL, Solder Extractor
Antistatic

16) SOLDERING IRON (Low Wattage)

17) TIP, 1/8 inch (Plated)

18) TIP, 1/16 inch (Plated)

19) SOLDER, Eutectic, multicore

AWG-20 63/37

20) SOLDER, Eutectic, multicore

AWG-22 63/37

21) WIRE STRIPPER, Hand

22) VISE, Work Position (panavise)

23) pliers, Diagonal Flush Cutting

24) pliers, Flat Nose, Medium

25) pliers, Long Nose, Medium

26) pliers, Round Nose, Medium

27) TWEEZERS, Antiwicking AWG-20

28) TWEEZERS, Antiwicking AWG-22

29) TWEEZERS, Antiwicking AWG-24

30) HEAT SHUNT, HS-1 (Short)

31) HEAT SHUNT, HS-2 (Medium)

32) HEAT SHUNT, HS-3 (Long)

33) HOLDER, Soldering Iron

34) SPONGE AND HOLDER

35) BOTTLE, Spray

36) HEAT GUN (For Shrink Tubing)

37) BLADES (Replacement for #21)

#1-2-6 Refer to the use of liquid flux
(resin only)

#3-4-5-7-8-10 Refer to cleaning circuit
being soldered

#11-12-13-14-15-34 Are for removing old
solder

#9-16-17-18-21 through 37 Are for
forming, shaping, bending, & heat sink

#19 and 20 are a special mixtures of
tin and lead that flows as soon as it
melts.

As an enthusiast of antiques, I
have stripped down and reassembled many

very old radios, TVs, and 1 TESLA COIL,
all with great success. It was ok then
to use a pocket knife, a high wattage
gun (the big one), and 64/40 solder. As
a matter of fact, I have even used a
small torch on a few connections. But
the days of stretching resistors from
one tube socket to another are gone.

Today, many circuit boards are
FANALIC, which will burn and fall apart
when exposed to too much heat. Much of
the inner connecting wiring is a very
thin strip of copper which, when
exposed to excessive heat, will come
unglued. Many of the components today
are very heat sensitive not to mention
the damage that can be done by static
charges (you know...when your kids
scuff their feet on the carpet then
touch you on the nose?).

The bottom line isif it's
clean, and oil free, EUTECTIC solder
will flow quickly (less heating time).
Get the connection?... Carry this list
out to your work bench and see how
close you come to having all the right
tools. Remember, keep practicing, and
"Do it right!"

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STARGLIDER II--

POWER graphics!

Retrieved from InfoShare-Tidewater
By Scott Chilcotte, Forum SYSOP

I was impressed with Starglider I
when it came out for a few reasons. The
dash panel of the spaceship (called the

AGAV) was one of the sharpest looking displays I'd seen on the ST. In the viewport, the computer managed literally dozens of three-dimensional, outlined objects at tremendous speed. Flying the ship gave me a more realistic feeling of actually traveling around objects at high speed than any flight simulator I'd tried so far.

Unfortunately Starglider I has a very limited goal, making it more of an arcade style game than a fast action adventure -- which is closer to what it was billed as. And since the graphics were vector instead of being solid, a lot of people felt it was too unrealistic to bother with.

It is still popular for the ST since it is one of the very few full-blown action games that runs in the high-res monochrome mode, for which a special monitor is needed. I have used it on a monochrome system and find it more visually impressive than the color version.

I have been using Starglider II less than a week, but it is the most fundamentally impressive program, with respect to 3-D graphics, realistic interaction, and sheer detail that I have seen yet - on ANY machine! What it took to put this game on what is essentially a single-sided ST disk -- that is SHARED with the Amiga version of the same program -- BOGGLES THE MIND!

This game uses solid graphics in a multitude of colors, which move fast yet smoothly throughout. There is a

considerable amount of good sounding digitized sound on the disk, but a double sided drive is required to hear it on the ST. Starglider II has dozens of configurable options, allowing it to be played with the mouse and keyboard, or with a joystick; one-handed, no less. There is a menu option to let the player examine each of the dozens of 3-D objects encountered in the game, and this is a thrill in itself. Not only do you get to look at each solid object, but you can rotate it on 3 axes, zoom at it from dozens of angles, animate it or single-step it through its motions (providing it's an animated object). You can "paint" with the viewed object, which is funky to watch but hard to describe.

The game play itself is a case of "action overload" for beginning players. Eerie sounds pour from the speaker, none of the usual "bleeps" from other games. These sounds mean things that your ship, called the Icarus, can interpret and describe for you -- such as "An Ergon scout ship is approaching the Icarus." Time to hightail it. You can ask for a visual interpretation of an object too.

The game starts in the atmosphere of a planet in a distant solar system. Objects are already flying around or protruding from the surface of the planet. You can find a tunnel entrance and shoot down inside the planet, but be careful, it's possible to travel straight through! You can also "tilt the stick" up, and fly clear into outer space -- even visit other planets! The Icarus has a powerful star drive,

replete with sounds and visual effects. Your screens stay active, though, and you can fly directly to other worlds. Space pirates abound so one must be careful.

You can fly with an outside view of the Icarus if you prefer, just as in Flight Simulator II. You can even tailor this view, lock down each of the axes, set the distance, etc. Another neat feature is the ship's tractor beam; you can grab small items and bring them aboard (which happens to be an essential part of the game). The Icarus itself is a very maneuverable craft, you can fly upside down, turn on a dime, fire any of five different weapons (lasers only to start), and make use of some very interesting and informative dash panel instrumentation.

Starglider I \$29.95
Starglider II \$39.95
Rainbird Software
Bohannon Drive
Menlo Park, Ca. 94025

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